

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and  
restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
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## The Quill

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Juan Bandini had an extensive exchange of correspondence with his son in law Abel Stearns. Bandini's handwriting was nice and clean and we think that at least some of the letters written before 1830 were written using a quill.

The quill was used for over a thousand years, starting as early as the seventh century. Even after the introduction of the metal nib, quills were still used because of their writing excellence and flexibility.

Geese or swan feathers were the best to make quills. After the feathers were plucked from the wing, they were sorted (not all feathers worked), cleaned, and trimmed. Then the shaft was carved to a very fine point and a slit was made for the ink to flow to the tip. The cuts were done with a small sharp knife which we know today as the "penknife". Left hand

pens have nibs that are cut at a left-slanting angle. Right hand nibs are straight.

No two quills are identical because of the structure of the feathers and the skill of the quill carver.

Writing with a quill takes practice. One has to apply very light pressure and a slanted hand to avoid ink stains, the constant dipping of the tip of the quill in ink made writing a very messy job, resulting in stained fingers and sometimes ink spills.

Poets and writers were commonly called "ink stained fingers" because they would be so focused on their words, they became clumsy with their quills.

The last step was to blot up the excess ink on the paper. A substance called pounce was shaken onto the paper. It was made out of salt, sand, cuttlefish bone, or pumice stone ground very finely (almost like talcum powder). From Roman times, through the medieval period up to the early 19th century pounce was used and later on blotting paper was introduced. Pounce was kept in a container similar to a salt shaker, and

the proper thing to do after using pounce was to return the excess pounce to the pot. These pounce pots could be made out of metal, glass or ceramic.

Ink was usually contained in two kinds of bottles: ink wells and ink bottles. Ink wells were more decorative containers that were purchased empty and were intended to be refilled with ink. Ink bottles were sold commercially and generally (not always) discarded after they were empty, but they could be refilled and used as ink wells.

Metal pen nibs came into common use in the 1830s, and by the 1850s the quality of these nibs was quite good and quill usage was fading.

Because of the delicate nature of feathers, quills are almost impossible to find at archaeological sites; metal nibs and ink bottles are some of the artifacts that ASM archaeologists have found at the Casa de Bandini. What if they find a penknife? This will let us know that maybe a feather was used to write Bandini's history.

